



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



VA SECRETARY APPOINTS NEW VETERANS LAW JUDGES TO ADJUDICATE MORE APPEALS FOR VETERANS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs' Board of Veterans' Appeals appointed 20 new Veterans Law Judges to deliver more veterans appeals decisions — bringing the total to 113 VLJs.

Most of the new VLJs will arrive prior to the end of fiscal year 2021, with additional judges to be appointed in fiscal year 2022. They will further the VA's effort to deliver enhanced benefits and services to veterans.

"Veterans Law Judges are a key part of ensuring veterans receive the benefits and services they have earned and deserve" said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "Once I swear in the new judges, this puts in place added resources to reduce the appeals inventory."

The judges will receive extensive training from seasoned mentor judges to prepare them for their new responsibilities and will be supported by a cadre of attorney-advisors and professional staff as they adjudicate appeals.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Fallen Hero Bridge Dedications....	2
NPRC Message.....	3
Veteran Outreach at Rally	4
VA COVID-19 Update	5
Upcoming Events.....	6
Upcoming Events.....	7

Board of Veterans' Appeals

BRIDGES TO BE DEDICATED IN HONOR OF PVT BRUCE RUBY AND CPT CHARLES LANE

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting State Bridge Dedication Ceremonies to honor Army Combat Veteran Private Bruce Ruby and Air Force Combat Veteran Captain Charles Lane, Jr.

The Lane ceremony will be held Monday, August 23, 2021, at 2:00 pm (CT) at the Kortan Hatwan American Legion Post 183 in Tabor (330 W. Yankton Street). Lane, son of the late Bea Johnson, was raised in Tabor and in 1965 enlisted in the United States Air Force to fulfill his dream of being a pilot. In 1967 he was sent to Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base. He was on his 92nd mission when he was shot down ten miles north of Hanoi on August 23, 1967. The South Dakota HWY 81 Bridge north of Yankton over the James River will be dedicated to CPT Lane.

The Ruby ceremony will be held Monday, August 30, 2021, at 10:30 am (CT) at the Scherr Howe Event Center in Mobridge (212 Main Street). Ruby, of Ipswich, was killed in action in France on November 9, 1944. The South Dakota HWY 12 Bridge over the Missouri River will be dedicated to PVT Ruby.

Naming bridges in honor of our combat veterans who died while serving their country is an initiative of Governor Kristi Noem and the South Dakota Departments of Military, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs.

"Whenever and wherever this nation has called, in times of darkness and danger, as well as in times of peace and prosperity, veterans have been there and have proudly carried the torch of liberty for all to see," said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Our fallen heroes are no longer with us, but their memory lives on in the hearts of their loved ones and our state," said Whitlock. "Naming our South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen will give us an opportunity of remembrance, reflection, and respect—for honoring the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. They cherished liberty and loved freedom enough to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life."



CPT Charles Lane
Memorial Bridge

James River

DELAYS IN OBTAINING MILITARY DOCUMENTS FOR ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATIONS

The National Cemetery Scheduling Office is asking for everyone's assistance.

As you may be aware, the government's primary repository for military personnel records, the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), is currently in a location identified by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to be in the **HIGH** level of community transmission rate for COVID-19. Due to the high transmission rate risk, NPRC has taken preventive safety measures and has returned to COVID Phase 0 levels, therefore significantly reducing available services for processing veteran discharge document requests. This decision negatively impacts their ability to obtain documents to determine eligibility for interment in national cemeteries.

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) is asking their funeral home partners to encourage families to work directly with funeral homes for assistance with burial in their VA national cemeteries. They will continue to make every attempt to assist veterans and their families, but if a service member's records cannot be obtained through any source other than NPRC, they may not be able to make a timely eligibility determination.

Family members are encouraged to search for any additional military documents which may be in their possession. Documents kept by the veteran may be the only documents available at this time to verify his or her eligibility for burial.

Families should work with veteran service organizations, county register of deeds, as they may have discharge documents on file for veterans. Any orders the service member may have received or any documents showing a military service number would be helpful. If the service member has a set of dog tags, please send a clear photograph of them to NCA.



SDDVA PARTNERS WITH VFW IN OUTREACH EVENTS AT THE STURGIS RALLY

Veterans of Foreign Wars National Commander Matthew Mihelic and South Dakota State Commander Barbara McKean were two of the VFW dignitaries at the Sturgis Bike Rally this week.

SDDVA Field Service Officer Will Huffmon was also in attendance at the Rally and worked with the VFW at their outreach booth.



"It's always a rewarding event to be a part of and to visit with veterans from across the nation," said Huffmon. "We have the chance to work with veterans from all eras and from all states."

The Rally is blessed with a lot of attendees who support the men and women who donned the uniform and served their country and as such the attendees participate in numerous fundraisers throughout the week that benefit our heroes.

VA EXPANDS MANDATE FOR COVID-19 VACCINES AMONG VHA EMPLOYEES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough will expand his previous COVID-19 vaccine mandate Friday, Aug. 13, to apply to most Veterans Health Administration employees and volunteers and contractors who work in VHA facilities, visit VHA facilities, or otherwise come into contact with VA patients and healthcare workers as part of their duties.

Under the expanded mandate, employees who will need to be vaccinated include Hybrid Title 38 and Title 5 VA health care personnel — such as psychologists, pharmacists, social workers, nursing assistants, physical therapists, respiratory therapists, peer specialists, medical support assistants, engineers, housekeepers, and other clinical, administrative and infrastructure support employees who come into contact with VA patients and healthcare workers.

“We’re now including most VHA employees and volunteers and contractors in the vaccine mandate because it remains the best way to keep veterans safe, especially as the Delta variant spreads across the country,” Secretary McDonough said. “This pandemic is not over and the VA must do everything in our power to protect veterans from COVID-19. With this expanded mandate, we can once again make — and keep — that fundamental promise.”



The Department’s decision is supported by numerous medical organizations, including the American Hospital Association, America’s Essential Hospitals, and a Multisociety group of the leading Infectious Disease Societies. The American Medical Association, American Nurses Association, American College of Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, Association of American Medical Colleges, and National Association for Home Care and Hospice also [endorsed mandating COVID-19 vaccination for health care workers](#).

As with the previous mandate, directive affected employees will have eight weeks to provide proof of vaccination to their local VHA Occupational Health Office.

All VA employees are eligible to be vaccinated at no personal expense at any of the VA facilities and would also receive four hours of paid administrative leave after demonstrating they have been vaccinated.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Aug 14—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—PVT Richard Bertram—Colome American Legion Post (208 Main Street)—Colome—2:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 16-18—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Ramkota Hotel—Pierre
- Aug 18—VASFHCS Show and Shine—Sioux Falls—(Enter off 26th Street)—5:30 pm—8:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 21—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—PFC Robert Rand—Parker Community Building (299 N. Main)—Parker—2:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 23—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser at Barrel House (4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls
- Aug 23—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—CPT Charles Lane—American Legion Post 183 (330 W. Yankton Street)—Tabor—2:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 30—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—PVT Bruce Ruby—Scherr Howe Event Center (212 Main Street)—Mobridge—10:30 am (CT)
- Sep 2-6—South Dakota State Fair—Huron
- Sep 2—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair
- Sep 2—Salute to Veterans Program at the SD State Fair—Freedom Stage—10:30 am (CT)
- Sep 4—727th/DAV Annual Poker Run—Swiftel Center (824 32nd Avenue)—Brookings
- Sep 6—State Offices Closed
- Sep 10—VABHHCS Veterans Stand Down—The Monument's Rushmore (Halls C & D)—444 Mt. Rushmore Road—Rapid City—1:00 pm—5:00 pm (MT)
- Sep 10—VABHHCS We Remember 9/11 20th Commemoration—The Monument's Rushmore (Halls C & D)—444 Mt. Rushmore Road—Rapid City—5:00 pm (MT)
- Sep 10—VABHHCS Veterans Recovery Concert—The Monument's Rushmore (Halls C & D)—444 Mt. Rushmore Road—Rapid City—6:30 pm (MT)
- Sep 11—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—1LT Herbert Lyman and T/SGT James Lyman—Thunder Hawk American Legion Post—Thunder Hawk—10:00 am (MT)
- Sep 11—Patriot Day Celebration—420 Villa Drive—Box Elder—2:30 pm (MT)
- Sep 17—POW/MIA Chair of Honor Dedication—State Capitol—2:00 pm (CT)
- Sep 18—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7
- Sep 18—Midwest Honor Flight Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—9:15 pm (CT)
Doors Open at 7:30 pm (CT)
- Sep 22-23—DAV and Auxiliary 14th District Fall Conference—DAV Headquarters—1519 W. 51st Street—Sioux Falls
- Sep 24—Veterans Stand Down—SD Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am—noon (CT)
- Sep 30—Folds of Honor Legacy Golf Tournament—Red Rock Golf Course—Rapid City



UPCOMING EVENTS (CONTINUED)

Oct 8—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—CPT Elmer Rusch—Brookings
Oct 9—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8
Oct 9—Midwest Honor Flight Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—8:45 pm (CT)
Doors Open at 7:00 pm (CT)
Oct 11—State Offices Closed
Oct 11—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SGT William Christensen—American Legion Post 194 (221 W. Main Street)—Parkston—1:00 pm (CT)
Oct 20—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—SD Military Heritage Alliance Building (1600 W. Russell)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
Oct 23—Midwest Honor Flight Hangar Dance at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls
Nov 11—State Offices Closed
Nov 11—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SSG Gregory Wagner—Hanson High School (600 Juniper Street)—Alexandria—1:00 pm (CT)
Nov 13—Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center (1401 Lazelle Street)—12:00—3:00 pm (MT)
Nov 25-26—State Offices Closed
Dec 14—Governor's Budget Address
Dec 18—Wreaths Across America—South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)
Dec 24—State Offices Closed
Dec 31—State Offices Closed

2022

Jan 11—Governor's State of the State Address
Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride
Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls



Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer
South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>
Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501
Phone: 605-773-8242
E-mail address: audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

